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USSR ENGINEERING RESTORES WATER TO THE USBOY RIVER

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"The ancient bed of the Uzboy" is indicated on USSR maps by a double-dotted line winding along the northwestern border of the Kara-Kum Desert. The line begins in the southern part of the Sarykamyshskaya depression near the landmark (urochishche) Charyshly and extends first south and then south-west to the shores of the Caspian Sea.

The bed of the Uzboy is the longest (775 kilometers), widest (up to 6 kilometers), and deepest (20-60 meters) of the old river beds to be found in the deserts of Central Asia, and it crosses the largest desert of the USSR. The bed itself is as well preserved as if waters had ceased to flow along its course less than 10 years ago. The bed of the Uzboy, at the point where it ceases to run in a north-south direction, turns first north and then west. Here the valley of Uzboy is rather shallow and about 5 kilometers wide. The bed itself is not wider than 200 meters and cuts through firm strata of ground. The bottom of the bed is covered with shells of various types of river shell-fish. Further down, the bed cuts through layers of white limestone, its bottom rises gradually, and then it ends abruptly in a precipice over a little lake about 60 or 75 meters in diameter and from 9 to 15 meters deep.

The water of the lake is very clear and its bottom sparkles with large transparent crystals of gypsum. The hollow of the lake was formed by a water-fall; at present, the lake is fed by the ground waters which seep through into it. Since the water evaporates rapidly in the hot, dry air of the desert, it is bitter and not suitable for human consumption. About 300 or 400 kilometers further downstream, the valley of the Uzboy passes over loose sands and clays. It is from 3 to 6 kilometers wide here and its depth varies from 20 to 40 meters. The sides of the valley, steep in some places and gently sloping in others, are

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covered with desert dunes, and yellow drifts of sand extend into the valley. The sands are sparsely covered with leafless shrubs of saksaul [Haloxylon, genus Arthrophytum], cherkez [Salsola arbuscula Richteri], kandym [Kandyk? Erythronium?], which resemble gigantic horsetail plants, and with tiny bushes of astragalus [Fabaceae family], ephedra [genus Ephedra], and small sand acacia trees.

The bed of the dead river, winding in and out along the entire valley, can be seen from the sandy slopes. Many sections of the bed are filled with water or contain dry salt deposits. The gently sloping bottom of the wide valley, with its occasional terraces, gives evidence of erosion by water during the lifetime of the now dead river.

About 500 kilometers of the Uzboy bed is dry, but the rest of it, about 250 kilometers long, is covered with salt-water lakes or salt deposits, the latter formed by evaporation of the ground water collecting in the bed.

A decree of the Council of Ministers USSR specifies that the Main Turkmen Canal will by-pass the Sarykamyskaya depression. It is not feasible to attempt to restore the large lake, since the river beds leading to the depression have long been clogged with silt and the youngest one, the Kunya-Dar'ya, if used, would supply only one tenth of the water supplied by the Amu-Dar'ya. Consequently, it would take almost 100 years to fill up the Sarykamyskaya depression. Furthermore, filling the depression with water would not restore the Uzboy River, since the evaporation in the vast lake would not leave any surplus water to flow out of the lake. For the above reasons, it was decided to dig a canal from the lower Amu-Dar'ya to the upper reaches of the Uzboy, by-passing the depression.

Many generations of Turkmen people have dreamed of seeing water in the Uzboy River, and now USSR engineering is making their dream come true. Two large dams will be built at the spots where the waterfalls formerly existed (near Kurtyskiy, Igdinskiye, and Burgunskiye). The dams will raise the water level in the river to such an extent that it will flow by gravity to districts which have never been irrigated before, including those situated close to the Iranian border. Restoration of the Uzboy will result in the irrigation of immense areas of land which will be used partly for growing cotton and partly (in the south) for growing subtropical plants and crops.

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